



Al-Risala 2002

January-February

Prophetic Vision

(Continued from previous issue)

His words determine the course of history

How extraordinary was the Prophet's declaration recorded as follows in books of *hadith*: "The chain of prophethood and messengership has been terminated and after me neither a prophet nor a messenger will be sent by God" (*Sahih Muslim*). In addition to his having said that there would be no prophet after him, this was also clearly stated in the Qur'an. (33:40)

Such a declaration had never been made before him, nor was it ever made after him. It is all the more astonishing that these words have become a matter of history. No one has so far dared to claim to be a prophet of God.

Certain personalities have been named in connection with the prophethood, but this is certainly not right. These spiritual personalities have never made a claim in clear terms such as the Prophet Muhammad did: No doubt, I am a Prophet of God. (Ibn Hisham)

The first instance in this connection is that of Musailama of Yamama (Arabia), a contemporary of the Prophet, who died in 633 AD. It is said that he claimed prophethood. But the fact is that his claim was not that of being an independent Prophet but rather of being a co-sharer in the Prophethood of Muhammad. He sent to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, in Madinah a two member delegation who brought with them a letter from him in which it was clearly stated: "I have been made a partner in this matter of prophethood with him (Muhammad)." (*Seerat ibn Hisham*, p. 244)

This makes it evident that Musailama had never claimed independent prophethood. His claim, in fact, was that of having been appointed as a partner. This means that he himself referred the matter of prophethood to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, himself. That is to say, that only if the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, testified to the veracity of his claim could he be held truthful. Since the Prophet did not so testify, Musailama's claim stands nullified.

Similarly, the Sikh religion is attributed to Guru Nanak, who was born in the Punjab. His devotees for their part sometimes call him a "messenger." Guru Nanak himself never claimed that he was a Prophet of God. The book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred book of Sikhism, attributed to Guru Nanak, is actually a collection of works by different people. Nowhere in this book, is it mentioned that Guru Nanak regarded himself as God's messenger or claimed to be one. This being so, including him in the list of prophets is not worthy of consideration.

Then there is the Iranian born Bahaullah (d. 1892), who is regarded as a prophet by his followers. The religion based on his teachings is known as the Bahai faith. Now the question is 'Did he claim to be a Prophet of God?' Events show that he never claimed either verbally or in writing to be a Prophet of God. His sole claim, according to the Bahai records, was that he was a Mahadi (Guided Person) and the manifestation of the unknowable God-*Mazhar-e-Haq*. (EB-732)

The declaration of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, that he was the last Prophet still remains unquestioned. The case of Bahaullah does not even figure in the list. For he never claimed to be a Prophet of God. What he claimed, rightly or wrongly, was something else, having nothing to do, directly with the declaration of the Prophet of God.

Another example is that of the India born Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani (d. 1908), regarded by some as a prophet. But, according to the historically established record, this attribution has no sanction in the works of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani. Therefore, he cannot be included in the list of prophets for he never pronounced himself to be a Prophet of God. On the contrary what he claimed was that he was a shadow of the Prophet Muhammad. He never projected himself as an independent Prophet. He thus left it entirely to the Prophet Muhammad either to validate or nullify his position in terms of prophethood.

As mentioned above, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, declared that after him no prophet or messenger would come until Doomsday. This means that after him neither a dependent nor an independent Prophet was to come to the world. The truth is that to say: "I am a Prophet" is more difficult than, putting a mountain on one's head. Such words can be uttered either by one who is a Prophet of God in the real sense or by one who is insane. No third person can let this claim fall from his lips.

I have had two personal experiences in this regard; one pertains to Guru Gurbachan Singh (d. 1980) and the other to Sree Karunakara Guru of Shantigiri, Trivandrum (d. May 6, 1999). The devotees of both holy men told me that their respective gurus were Prophets of God. I said that it was the guru who had the knowledge of being a Prophet of God, and not his devotees. Therefore, the question of considering such a claim seriously arose only when the concerned person uttered these words: "I am God's Prophet." So long as these words were not spoken by the concerned person, the case was not worthy of consideration.

In the case of Guru Gurbachan Singh of Delhi, chief of Nirankari mission, some of his devotees visited my office and claimed that their guru was the Prophet of the time. I said that if they believed that to be true, I would come to see their guru, and they were to ask him actually to make the assertion that he was a Prophet of God. They said that they would request their guru to do so and that he would certainly utter these words in my presence. I further added that on that occasion I shall not debate his claim. After listening to those words from the lips of the guru, I would come back without questioning it. The devotees talked to their guru, and fixed the date and the time. At the appointed hour I went to the Sant Nirankari Mandal (New Delhi), where I was ushered into the Guru's chamber. His devotees too were

present along with me. Their faces showed that they were convinced that the guru would utter the desired words. I stayed with the guru for about an hour. He continued to talk to me about his mission all this while, but he never uttered these words. For I had given my word to his devotees that I would neither question him nor enter into any debate, so after waiting for one hour, I finally left.

In the other case, that of Sree Karunakara Guru of Shantigiri, a group of his devotees came from Trivandrum to Delhi, where they visited our centre and told me that their guru was a Prophet of God. I told them that I wanted to hear these words from the lips of the Guru. They invited me to their Ashram at Shantigiri and assured me that their guru would certainly utter these words.

I went to Trivandrum in February 1999. There I met the Guru at the Shantigiri Ashram, which is located about 20 km away from the Trivandrum airport. This meeting took place in a spacious room, in which many of his devotees and some foreigners, men and women, were also present. These devotees were either standing or sitting on the carpet. The Guru reclined on a bed, beside which a chair was placed for me.

Thus the distance between the guru and me was about less than one meter. Since the guru did not know Hindi, the conversation took place in English. After some introductory remarks, I came to the point and asked him directly:

Do you claim that you are a Prophet of God in the same sense in which Moses, Jesus and Muhammad claimed to be Prophets of God?

A silence fell for a few seconds after my question, then the guru replied quite clearly: "No, I make no such claim." Afterwards there was no need for further questions on this topic. I talked to him about his mission for some time, then took his leave after receiving his special parshad – an orange.

To conclude, we may confidently assert that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was endowed with such divine vision as enabled him to visualize the future very clearly. That is the secret behind all his religious, social and political achievements. It is no wonder then that, by the virtue of this vision, he was also able to predict the continuing ideological supremacy of his prophethood – to the extent that the history itself has refused, and will refuse credibility to any later ideological counter claims, be they made in prophetic or non-prophetic terms.

The Japanese Experience

In August 1945, the U.S.A. dropped two atom bombs on Japan, thereby reducing two of its major cities to ruins. Strangely enough, the Japanese seem to bear no grudge against the Americans, for, they say, it had only reacted to Japan's violence in the arena of war. The responsibility, therefore, needs to be shared by each side. This realistic attitude on the part of the Japanese has seen them through all kinds of adversity and brought them to extraordinary heights of progress in modern times.

Both the big industrial cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bustling with life, became enormous areas of devastation in a matter of minutes. Within a ten-mile radius every kind of life – human, animal and vegetable was blown to bits. One and half million people died on the spot. Ten thousand of them simply disappeared. Yet these cities have now been built up once again with wide streets, spacious houses, parks and gardens, all of which have a modern look. Only one ruined building has been left as it was, in order to remind one of the grim punishment meted out to the Japanese during the Second World War.

When Mr. Khushwant Singh visited Japan, he learnt, much to his astonishment, that the Japanese do not exploit the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in order to discredit the U.S.A. It is other nations, on the contrary, who have exploited these events for this purpose. When Khushwant Singh asked the reason for this attitude, a Japanese replied in a surprisingly calm tone:

"We hit them first at Pearl Harbour. We killed a lot of them. They warned us of what they were going to do, but we thought they were only bluffing. They beat us fair and square. We were quits, and now we are friends (*The Hindustan Times*, April 4, 1981).

A memorial has been erected to commemorate the dead, the victims of a gruesome tragedy. In the museum are displayed photographs depicting death and destruction on a mass scale. About 70 lakh Japanese visit Hiroshima every year to witness this spectacle. In the course of conversation with the Japanese, however, one can sense the hidden feelings of hatred against Americans. But they do not let it rule their lives.

By virtue of such a temperament they have scaled such great heights of progress in a very short span of time. They own neither petrol resources nor mineral wealth, most of their raw materials having to be imported. Keeping all these drawbacks in view, it is most amazing that they have dominated world markets. This is mainly owing to the superior quality of their goods.

Mr. Khushwant Singh also enquired about the prospects of the legal profession there. He was told that it was not a flourishing business, the reason being that the Japanese preferred settling disputes on their own to suing in the courts. Willingness to admit faults by each party is the surest way to bring quarrels to an end. It is only when either party seeks to place the whole blame on the other side that the quarrel

takes a turn for the worse. Whereas the very gesture of shouldering the blame softens up the other side, with the result that the dispute dies a natural death.

This realistic attitude has greatly benefited the Japanese in many respects. For instance, this makes it possible for them to place their trust in one another. They thus save the time and money they would otherwise expend on lengthy legal documents. There are fifty thousand lawyers in the U.S.A., while there are only 11 thousand in Japan. Such legal experts are just not in demand.

Most of the commercial institutions place their trust in verbal understandings. Formerly it was practised only among the Japanese, but now foreign investors have also started to take advantage of this practice. Avoidance of unnecessary legal obligations invariably speeds up the work.

Essentially, such an outlook gives rise to unity. It is undoubtedly the greatest force that contributes to the success of a nation. In the words of an expert on Japanese affairs the secret of Japan's success lies in "never quarrelling amongst themselves, always doing everything together," (*The Hindustan Times*, April, 1981).

The Root Cause of Riots

What is the reason for the senseless manner in which Muslims react in the face of provocation? Perhaps we can trace it to their pride psychology. It comes into being when religion is no longer treated as a matter of responsibility, but as a matter of pride. Such an attitude towards religion plays a fair share in contributing to the degradation of the Ummat, the community of believers.

The Qur'an says: "The faithful servants of God are they who walk upon the earth modestly and, when the foolish ones address them, answer: Peace." (Al-Furqan, 63) However, the attitude is reversed when religious teachings cease to inspire people to do good deeds and a moral decline sets in. People then become proud and haughty. Whether or not they act upon the teachings of their religion, they believe that they continue to be the chosen people of God. Their attachment to their religion is reduced to lip service: it exists in theory but not in practice; in the outward form but not in spirit. When religion serves only to show one's superiority over others, a high degree of moral perversion has been reached.

People hold their heads high and declare that they are the upholders of a religion which has retained the pure and original form of monotheism. However, they contradict themselves by manifesting such reverence for personalities both alive and dead as should be accorded only to the Lord, their God. They take pride in saying that Islam teaches one complete equality, but they continue to discriminate between man and man. They are the first to pronounce in public that Islam exhorts one to do good and shun bad in all circumstances, but in private they disregard this. If their attention is drawn to this contradiction in their words, in deeds, they will turn hostile to anyone daring to criticize them.

They take immense pride in describing the sublime character of the Prophet, for instance, his resistance to provocation; yet they themselves become annoyed about quite trivial matters and even justify their negative attitude by asking why they should not react in the face of provocation.

Islamic Activism

(continued from previous issue)

Unlimited Scopes of Patience

When the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, began his mission of *tawhid* (unity of God) in ancient Makkah, there existed as usual a status quo. The Quraysh had assumed the leadership of the town, and according to their beliefs, they had established an idolatrous system. Now the question arose as to how the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, should begin his work. It appeared that the status quo under the hegemony of the Quraysh would have to be abolished and only then would the path be cleared for the Prophet's mission. At that juncture, certain basic guidance was revealed to the Prophet. God declared in the Qur'an:

Surely with every hardship there is ease; with every hardship there is surely ease. (94:5-6)

This means that although the status quo in Makkah appeared to be an obstacle, by the very law of nature, opportunities for the furtherance of his aims also existed side by side. Therefore, any attempt to change the status quo was not to be made in the first stage itself. Without disturbing the prevailing situation such opportunities as were available in other fields were to be utilized to promote the Islamic mission.

The method Islam prescribes for the achievement of our goals, and the model example we find in the life of the Prophet, can be described, in brief, as a method based on patience. That is, remaining in harmony with the status quo and launching one's struggle in the sphere of the possible. In this respect, it may be called positive status quoism.

1. An Obstacle Turned into a Stepping Stone:

When the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, began his mission in Makkah, hundreds of idols had been placed in the most sacred mosque. The Kabah, which was built as a centre of monotheism, had virtually become a centre of *shirk* (polytheism). At that time the method adopted by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, provides a perfect example of positive status quoism.

What the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, did was to refrain completely from interfering with the idols and idol worship. Instead, letting things remain as they were, the Prophet began to communicate the call of monotheism to the people who used to visit the Kabah daily, it being a central place. The Prophet availed of these large gatherings by going there every day and reading out to them passages from the Qur'an. In this way Islam began to spread gradually in the country.

2. Avoidance of Protest Gradually Changes the Status Quo:

The Prophet lived in Makkah for thirteen years after he received his prophethood. During this period, a group of people embraced Islam, but the majority continued to be diametrically opposed to it.

At that time in Makkah, Dar-al-Nadwa was its political centre. The Makkan leaders held meetings here and decided unanimously to boycott the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him. When they failed to apply a brake even with this method, they decided to assassinate him. At that time, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, did not launch a campaign to capture Dar-al-Nadwa, the centre of his opposition. The Prophet did not even commence hostilities against these Makkan leaders. There was no fight to the finish. Instead what he did once again was to accept the status quo and quietly leave that place for Madinah, which became the centre of his activities. As history tells us, extraordinary results were produced through this superb and far-sighted strategy.

3. Internal Harmony Results in External Expansion:

At that time in Madinah, three religious groups existed – Muslims, Idolators and Jews. Here too the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, did not directly confront the status quo. Instead, he issued a charter which is known as Sahifa-al-Madinah in the history of Islam. In this situation he adopted almost the same kind of policy as that known as non-interference in modern times. He declared that every religious group would enjoy full freedom in religious and cultural matters, and that the systems in Madinah will be run on the basis of the policy of mutual respect.

Consequently, the Prophet found an opportunity to consolidate his mission without unnecessarily setting himself on a collision course. Even after he had left his homeland, the Makkans did not leave him alone. They continued their hostile activities against him. Many big and small battles took place as a result.

Again the Prophet followed the same policy of refraining from interfering with the status quo. By accepting the superior position of the Makkans he entered into a peace treaty with them, which is known as the Hudaybiyya Peace Treaty. In this, he acknowledged the established position of the Makkans and made a truce with the condition that no war would take place between the two parties for a period of ten years. The Hudaybiyya Peace Treaty was a successful example of positive status quoism. Consequently, the Prophet, by accepting the prevalent situation in Arabia, secured full opportunities for peaceful *da'wah* struggle and this opened the door for a “clear victory” in the words of the Qur'an (48:24). The principle of Islamic activism has been briefly alluded to in the Qur'an:

Therefore bear up patiently as did the steadfast prophets before you. Bear up with patience and do not seek to hurry on their doom. (46:35).

According to this verse, there were in any given situation two ways of launching a campaign, – the patient and the impatient.

The latter is that of emotional while the former is that of considered response. The impatient person launches himself on a collision course at the very outset making the continuance of the struggle impossible. On the contrary, one who follows the patient method, and avoids any confrontation with the status quo, is free to make full use of any opportunities which come his way. This method leads to sure success without creating any new problems in society.

In short, there is unlimited scope for both individuals and groups who adopt the patient method as a matter of permanent policy in all their affairs. In this lies the secret of all great successes. This course of positive status quoism ensures that all our powers and potential will be completely focused on the accomplishment of long term constructive plans, rather than being unnecessarily wasted in any non-productive or even self-destructive activity against the status quo.

Moreover, if you are one of those who wish to work for Islam or struggle for the revival of the Muslim Ummah, then treading the path of patience and adhering to the principle of positive status quoism is strictly obligatory on you. Firstly as we have shown earlier, it has been highly recommended in the Qur'an, and secondly, it was by the application of this same method that Islam secured an unopposed victory over all its enemies, bringing into existence, as a result, the ideal Muslim society of the early period of Islam.

The Law of Nature

Harry Emerson Fosdick has explained an important fact of life as follows:

"No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. No life ever grows until it is focused, dedicated, disciplined."
(Living Under Tension, by Harry Emerson Fosdick)

There is but one law of nature, which applies to both animate and inanimate objects. It is that there is a price to be paid for every end in life: without paying that price, nothing can be achieved.

In this world one has to sink before one can rise; one has to resign oneself to loss before one can gain, to backwardness before one can advance; one has to be able to accept defeat before one can claim victory.

The world in which man lives has been created by God, not by man himself. This may appear to be a simple fact, but it is one that man usually forgets in his everyday life. Since we are living in God's world, we have no alternative but to understand His laws, and follow them. There is no other way we can make a place for ourselves in the world.

Those who wish to advance and be successful in life without passing through the necessary stages, will have to build another world for themselves – one which satisfies their own requirements; for in the world that God has created, their dreams can never come true.

Islam – An Integral Part of Life

When a stone is dropped into a glass of water, it descends to the bottom and settles to one side. It is in the water but separate from it. On the other hand, if dye is put into the same glass, the dye and water combine. Now the water is not separate from the dye. Both have intermingled in such a way that no one can detect any difference between the two.

The relationship between Islam and a person should be like that of dye and water, not of stone and water. Islam should not just be an accessory to a Muslim's life: it should merge with his whole being. It should enter into his thoughts, molding his intellect in its own fashion. Islam should become the eye with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, the hands and feet with which he performs his day-to-day functions. Islam should so take possession of a person that it excludes all else. Every statement should bear the stamp of Islam and every action should be dyed in Islamic colours.

If Islam is like a stone in water, then it is not Islam at all. Faith should be absorbed in a person like dye dissolved in water. Just as the emotions of love and hate are felt by the whole body so, when one adopts Islam in the real sense of the world, it should become an issue affecting one's whole existence. The Muslim and Islam should become inseparably attached.

The Revolutionary Role of Islam

As a result of ignorance the evil known as the worship of natural phenomena was born in human society. Man attributed divinity to mere creatures. He began to worship all the things in the world, holding them to be gods. Owing to this intellectual aberration, idolatry became a rooted feature of human civilization. Not even the coming of thousands of prophets and reformers could bring about any change in this state of affairs, in the practical sense. The rejection of the Prophets brought down on the deniers the chastisement of God, but *shirk* could never be wiped out from society. Then God took it upon Himself to intervene. One major manifestation of this divine intervention in human history was the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad. An American encyclopedia has very appropriately described his coming as having "changed the course of human history."

French historian, Henri Pirenne, has expressed it thus: "Islam changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of history was overthrown."

The Qur'an, in defining the objective of the divine intervention, has this to say:

It is He that has sent forth His Prophet with guidance and the true faith, so that he may exalt it above all religions. God is the All-sufficient witness (48:28).

This has found expression in a *hadith* recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari:

He will not depart from this world as God has decreed, unless and until these people are brought to the straight path. (*Fathul Bari* 449-8).

This shows that, for the prophets of the past, communication alone was required, whereas for the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, not just communication but also implementation was required.

The task of the earlier prophets was completed with the full communication of the message to the people. But the divine plan in sending the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, to the world was to bring about a practical revolution. His message could not, therefore, remain at the theoretical stage.

It being beyond human capacity to make the end result a certainty, how was the Prophet's message to be translated into reality? It all became possible due to the special divine succour extended to the Prophet by God. This took the form of a divine plan which had two basic aspects to it: one, to provide the Prophet with a powerful and trustworthy team, and the other to significantly weaken the enemies of monotheism by means of a special strategy, so that the Prophet and his companions could easily dominate their opponents.

The first part of this divine plan was brought to completion in the form of the settlement of Ismail, son of Prophet Ibrahim, in the unpopulated desert of Arabia two thousand five hundred years ago. At that time it was a totally isolated place situated far from the centres of civilization. There a community was raised by Ismail ibn Ibrahim, trained in the desert atmosphere where there was nothing save Nature. As a natural result of this unadulterated atmosphere, (free from all man-made pollution), the human qualities of the inhabitants of the desert were fully preserved. It was like a vast natural training camp. It took more than two thousand years to evolve a nation of such high Calibre as to be called a "nation of heroes" by a western scholar. In the history of the Arabs this nation is known as the Ismailites. Despite religious perversion having set in, so distinguished were they in human values – thanks to their particular training – that they had no peers among those who came before or after them.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, one of the distinguished members of the Banu Ismail, struggled for about thirteen years in Makkah and ten years in Madinah. Ultimately, more than one hundred thousand people believed in him and joined his mission. Each and every one of his companions possessed a strong and dependable character. In this way the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, in an exceptional way, secured a team by which he could bring the message of the prophets to fruition – taking the prophetic mission from the theoretical stage of ideology to the practical stage of revolution.

The next part of this divine plan consisted of weakening these anti-monotheism forces so considerably that the last Prophet might subjugate them and usher in the desired revolution in the very first generation itself. To achieve this end, the Arabian tribes remained engaged for a long period of time in bloody, internecine warfare. Consequently, when the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was sent to the world, the idolatrous tribes of Arabia, having so weakened themselves, could not continue their resistance for long. This enabled the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, to overcome Arabia and root out idolatry completely within a short period of time.

In those days there were two great empires outside of Arabia. These empires kept the major parts of Asia and Africa under their full control. Their power was so great that the Arabs could not even have dreamed of overcoming them. Despite this extremely out of proportion difference, how did it become possible for the Arabs of the very first generation, to conquer both these empires – the Sassanid and Roman – in such a decisive way as to crush them absolutely, resulting in the dominance of monotheism over idolatry throughout this region? This miracle became a reality owing to a special divine strategy, which is paralleled by the case of the Romans:

The Romans have been defeated in a neighbouring land. But after their defeat they shall themselves gain victory within a few years. (Qur'an, 30:1-3)

History shows that from 602 to 628 A.D., extremely extraordinary events took place between these two great empires.

First, the royal families in the respective countries clashed internally with one another, and in consequence, many individuals of great political worth were killed. In fact, these feuds gave a death blow to these empires, shaking them to the very roots. Subsequently, certain factors led to the destructive collision of these empires with one another. First the armies of the Sassanid Empire crossed the border of the Roman Empire to attack it. Circumstances proved favourable and they succeeded to the extent that the Roman Emperor Heraclius decided to flee from his Palace in Constantinople. But again, events took a new turn. Heraclius regained his lost confidence and after making full preparations, attacked the Sassanid empire, destroyed their armed forces and penetrated right into the heart of Jerusalem.

These civil wars, lasting for about twenty five years, considerably weakened both these empires. Therefore, during the pious caliphate when the Arab forces entered the Roman and Sassanid empires, they managed to advance with great speed.

Historical Revolution

This expansion of the Islamic empire was not simply a political event. Its aim, in fact, was to set in motion a revolutionary process in history. This process had been initiated in Makkah itself, then it traveled from Makkah to Madinah, to Damascus and Baghdad from where it entered Spain and thereafter it spread all over Europe and the entire world. We would probably be right in saying that the 20th century saw the culmination of this process.

There are two basic aspects to this movement. One was the end of religious persecution. (This kind of persecution has been mentioned in the Qur'an as '*fitna*'). (8:39)

The process began with the end of idolatry and was completed during the lifetime of the Prophet. The other, the advent of religious freedom, came about later, during the pious caliphate; with the disintegration of the two great empires – the Sassanid and Byzantine – the two greatest pillars of religious persecution were uprooted, and religious freedom became the order of the day. However, no great revolution materializes all of a sudden. It reaches fruition only by a long historical process, and the Islamic revolution was no exception to this rule. The process of human liberation, initiated by Islam, continued over a long period to make advances through individual and collective efforts, taking various forms. The second Caliph, Umar Faruq (d.644) addressing one of his governors and his son in a well known case asked: "Since when have you enslaved people while their mothers had given birth to them in freedom?" (*Al-Abqariat Al-Islamia*).

This voice was echoed eleven hundred years later by the well known French reformer Rousseau (d. 1778). His book, titled *The Social Contract*, began with this famous sentence: 'Man was born free, but I find him in chains'. This concept of intellectual and religious freedom had fully matured by the end of the 20th century. With the establishment of the United Nations all the nations of the world signed its charter of Human Rights, proclaiming that intellectual and religious freedom is the irrevocable right of every human being and that on no pretext can it be abrogated.

Freedom of Choice

Through a long process, that age has finally come when man has secured the absolute right to adopt the religion of his choice and to propagate that religion, on the sole condition that he will not use violence in the exercise of his religious freedom. This change brought about in the world has thrown open all the doors of communication formerly locked to the message of monotheism; doors that had been locked by the ancient absolutist regimes.

The creation plan of God regarding human beings has been thus alluded to in the Qur'an: "He created death and life, so that He might try which of you is best in deed." (67:2).

To achieve this end, it is essential that an atmosphere of freedom prevail in this world, that everyone without any hindrance may play his role. Without freedom, neither reward nor punishment can be awarded to anyone. An atmosphere where there is no intellectual freedom nullifies the very scheme of God – the scheme according to which man has been created and placed in this world. That is why these regimes based on an absolutism, which had taken root centuries ago, had to be overthrown.

In recent times the communist revolution of 1917 again attempted to establish a vast empire based on the coercive system of the ancient type. But since this ran counter to the divine plan, God brought about a situation which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Man again was granted the same freedom as was available to the rest of the world.

The end of the superstitious era

Another basic change wrought by the Islamic revolution was similar in some respects to the scientific revolution of modern times; that is, the rooting out of superstitious thinking on scientific grounds and the general prevalence of thinking based on facts.

As mentioned above, the continued existence of the idolatrous way of life and thinking in ancient times was due to the ignorance of human beings regarding nature. Ancient man used to judge natural phenomena by their appearance. Holding them sacred, he began to worship them. For the first time in human history, Islam succeeded in convincing people that these phenomena of nature were not creators, but only creatures. They were entirely helpless beings, mere slaves and not the masters of man.

In the wake of this revolution the ideological base of idolatry was wiped out altogether. All those things held sacred were relegated to the status of mere creatures. They were there to be harnessed by man and not for man to be enslaved by them. The sun was held to be a god and worshipped in ancient times; the man of today is converting the sun into solar energy. Ancient man held the moon sacred; modern man has set his foot on it. Ancient man had deified the river; modern man has converted rivers into steam power, etc.

In this way, it has happened for the first time in human history that the phenomena of nature, looked upon by ancient man with reverence, have now become objects of investigation. In other words, Islam started the process of scientific enquiry. The Qur'an repeatedly enjoins man to reflect on the objects of the universe. This is no simple matter. The act of pondering over the nature of the phenomena of the universe has been accorded the status of worship in Islam. As a result of this thinking, for the first time in known history, all things in the universe have been subjected to research and investigation.

The scientific way of thinking of the modern age initiated in the early period of Islam, continued as a process to grow, spreading from one country to another until it reached the west where it saw its culmination in the western world. In respect of its reality, this scientific thinking is a revolution desirable by Islam itself.

After this revolution, for the first time in human history the idolatrous way of thinking has been totally deprived of its ideological base. The concept of the sacredness of natural phenomena is now seen for what it is – a superstition, for modern scientific investigation has demonstrated belief of this kind to be baseless.

All that happened was exactly in accordance with the divine plan, the Prophet and his companions having been asked to carry out this divine scheme: "Fight them until there be no persecution and religion be wholly God's." (8:39) This means that there was no longer any barrier to man's making a choice in the way of God.

This was the final goal of the revolution brought about by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and his companions. It ended that absolutist system of coercion which places curbs upon personal decisions about one's religion. It also removed the veil of obstacles in ideological terms which confused and mislead people, as a result of which they began to worship creatures supposing them to be creators. (For further details see the author's book, *Islam: the Creator of the Modern Age*).

The Qur'an tells us that there is no compulsion in the matter of religion, with the provision that true guidance and misconceptions should be thoroughly separated from one another. (2:256)

Truth and falsehood stand clearly separated from each other, just like light and darkness after the sun has risen. This was something which – after the Islamic revolution – could be grasped beyond the shadow of a doubt by anyone who sought reality with an open mind. No one was left groping in the dark. And no one was left with any excuses for rejecting God.

Truth Unveiled

To this particular end, God brought about the revolutions in human history, as mentioned above. Now truth and untruth have become so distinct from one another that there is no thick or thin veil in between: the task of clarification has been performed so thoroughly that the man of today has total freedom of choice. Now in his journey towards God, man is hindered neither by false ideologies nor by practical barriers.

Going Places on Home Ground

Paul Dirac, who died in November 1984, was known to the world as the developer of the mathematics of the quantum mechanical theory – in effect the physics of the smallest part of the atom. He received his initial education, however, not in the field of mathematics, but in that of electrical engineering. Though he obtained a first-class degree at the Merchant Venturers Technical College, he did not excel in this subject. As J.G. Crowther wrote in his obituary: "His teachers did not consider him a genius."(*The Muslim*, Islamabad, November 23, 1984).

It was only when he entered the mathematics department of Bristol University, and then went on to St. John's College to continue his studies in the same field, that "it was perceived that he had extraordinary intellectual powers."

In the field of mathematics, Dirac was on home-ground. His success as a physical mathematician was phenomenal. Following Werner Heisenberg's publication of the idea of a new quantum mechanics in 1925, Dirac independently went to work on creating an appropriate new mathematics for handling it. The result was his p-Q number theory, completed in 1928, a "highly original and extremely elegant mathematical technique" in which "he showed how the theories of quantum mechanics and relativity could be combined." In 1930 he published his textbook of quantum mechanics, which immediately became a classic. In 1932, at the incredibly early age of 30, he was appointed Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University, the chair Sir Isaac Newton had once occupied – a fitting post for one whom Niels Bohr called "the most remarkable scientific mind since Newton."

Dirac was not successful in electrical engineering, but when he entered his own domain – mathematics – he thrived and showed amazingly innovative genius. Like Dirac, everyone has a domain of his own in which he can excel. Failure in one field is no reason to lose hope: there is always another field awaiting one, in which the flower of one's destiny can flourish and thrive.

Worship of God

Worship, in form, consists of the performance of certain ritual actions. In essence, it is to form a central focus. From this point of view everyone is worshipping something or the other. It is a rare being who does not cherish some overriding ambition, which he will do his utmost to realize. All men feel some insufficiency in themselves and need some help from outside to make up for it. When one yearns for God alone and puts implicit trust in Him, one is, in reality, worshipping Him. To concentrate one's emotions on something else is to worship others besides Him.

A person who worships God will invoke Him alone, and the prescribed prayers are the day-to-day form which this supplication will take. The worshipper becomes so involved with His Lord that his requirements become minimal; a particular form that this diminution takes is fasting. His adoration of God compels him to strive towards God, and one historic manifestation of his longing is Hajj. He does unto others as he would be done by, and in *zakat* – charity – this takes a regular, practical form.

The whole life of a true worshipper of God, both inwardly and outwardly, becomes an act of worship, bowing only to God and fearing Him alone – putting His considerations first and foremost in all matters. Placing oneself totally in God's hands, one becomes God's own, and God becomes one's own. And one's heart overflows with the love of God.

The Role of Non-Muslims in Islamic Development

Islam is the religion of Nature, and in treading its path, it is non-discriminatory, finding room within its scheme of things for every segment of society. Rigidity is quite alien to its process of development.

There is a meaningful *hadith* in *Sahih al-Bukhari* to this effect. According to this *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said: "God Almighty will strengthen this religion [Islam] through a *fajir* (one who is not a true Muslim) person as well (Bukhari).

This is a very important declaration because in this world, any natural process begins with the involvement of different elements – as happened in the case of Islam. Humanity as a whole is an interdependent body and Islam is not an exception.

Islam is an ideology aimed at human development, and no process of human development can endure without involving humanity at large. There are several phases in the history of Islam which illustrate this point.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, spent his first thirteen years of prophethood in Makkah. At that time in Makkah, there existed a tribal system. There was no organized state in the modern sense. It was necessary for everyone to have protection under one of the tribal chiefs. So, according to this prevalent custom, the Prophet availed himself of the protection of two of the local chieftains—Abu Talib and Mut'im bin Adi alternatively, both of whom happened to be non-Muslims.

After spending thirteen years in Makkah, the Prophet migrated to Madinah. It was a very risky journey because his Opponents had announced a reward of a hundred camels to anyone who would bring them the Prophet's head. In spite of this, the Prophet chose a member of the rival group to be his guide for the journey, because this guide was known to be an honest person in his profession. He is known in Islamic history as Abdullah bin Urayqit. He was a non-Muslim and died as a non-Muslim in Makkah.

After the migration of the Prophet, a series of armed conflicts broke out between the Prophet and his opponents. One of the military campaigns of his opponents, known in Islamic history as Ghazwa al-Ahzab, was so devastating that even the Qur'an refers to it as one of the most terrifying moments in Islamic history. At the time, the Muslims had become quite helpless against their opponents. The only thing that eased this most difficult of situations was the role a Madinite played—that of a middleman.

This man came to the Prophet in the night when Madinah was surrounded by enemy forces. He said, "I have become a Muslim in my heart, but I have not made it public yet. So the *mushriks* and the Jews both have trust in me." Realizing that this man was in a position to play a peace-making role between the two parties, since he was trusted by both, the Prophet said, "You are the only one in this position among us."

This man began, therefore, to negotiate between the two parties and history tells us that it was he who cleared the path to peace at this juncture between the two rival parties. It was because of his efforts that the enemy decided to lift the siege of the city of Madinah and return to their homes.

Islamic history contains many examples of the role played by non-Muslims in the development of Islam. This principle of non-Muslim involvement in Islamic development can also be extended from an individual level to the level of an entire group.

In the present day context, Western civilization is an appropriate example. Although Western civilization developed in non-Muslim societies without any direct contribution from the Muslim minds, it is helpful for Islam in many aspects. For example, it is this Western civilization that finally ended religious persecution and opened the door for religious freedom and *da'wah*. Similarly, it is this Western civilization which has developed the modern means of communication that has made it possible for Muslims to do *da'wah* work on a global scale. Also, modern scientific discoveries made in the West have paved the way to proving the beliefs of Islam on a scientific basis.

In previous times, it was assumed that the truths of Islam, or religion for that matter, could be supported only by arguments that were inferential in nature and not by arguments that were direct. But modern science, in bringing human thought from a macro cosmic level to a microcosmic level, has made it possible to accept that inferential reasoning is as valid as direct reasoning. This development has allowed Islam to prove its truth on the same level as scientific theories are proven.

From these few examples, it is clear that non-Muslims are also helpful to the cause of Islam in many ways. Islamic development is such a universal process that all Muslim and non-Muslim forces contribute towards its fulfillment.

This aspect of a role for those other than Muslims in the development of Islam serves a moral end as well. It makes Muslims sympathetic towards the rest of the world so that the hearts of Muslims are filled with love for others instead of hate, enmity and distrust.

The contribution of non-Muslims to Islam has not been of a temporary nature. It has continued throughout Islamic history. In present times these contributions made by non-Muslims, especially in the field of scientific discoveries, have been far greater than ever before.

What are these scientific discoveries? They are, in actual fact, the discoveries of Nature. Nature, or in the words of the Qur'an, "all the things of the heavens and the earth" are signs of God. Accordingly, all the things of the universe serve as scientific argument for Islamic teachings. In this respect the discoveries of Nature are in fact the discoveries of the divine realities which testify to the truth of the teachings of Islam. I have gone into considerable detail on this point in other books. Here I wish to give only one ample to illustrate my point.

There is a verse in the Qur'an:

We shall save your body this day, so that you may be a sign for those who come after you.
(10:92)

This refers to the Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh, a contemporary of the Prophet Moses. As we know, Pharaoh had been drowned by God in the deep waters of the sea. At that moment God had decreed the preservation of Pharaoh's body in order that it might be a sign of God for future generations.

However, neither at the time of revelation of the Qur'an, nor even a thousand years later, did anyone have any knowledge regarding Pharaoh's body; it remained absolutely unknown to the Muslim world. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that this preserved body was discovered. This prediction of the Qur'an had been fulfilled to the letter. However, this task was performed entirely by non-Muslims.

It was a French scholar, Prof. Loret, who discovered this mummified body of Pharaoh at Thebes in the King's Valley, from where it was transported to Cairo. Prof Elliot Smith removed its wrapping on the 8th of July, 1907. He gives a detailed description of this operation and examination of the body in his book, *The Royal Mummies*. (1912)

In June 1975, Dr. Maurice Bucaille was allowed by the Egyptian authorities to examine Pharaoh's body. Special investigations were made during this examination of this mummified body along with a team of specialists. By means of several modern techniques like radiography, Carbon-14 dating, and endoscopy, the exact period of this body was established. After study and research lasting several years by a team of western experts, it was scientifically proved that this body definitely belonged exactly to the period of Moses.

It was also established beyond any doubt that this Pharaoh died either from drowning or from very violent shocks proceeding the moment when he was drowned.

The French author, Dr. Maurice Bucaille, rounds off the chapter called 'The Exodus' in his book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, with these thrilling words:

Those who seek among modern data for proof of the veracity of the Holy Scriptures will find a magnificent illustration of the verses of the Qur'an dealing with the Pharaoh's body by visiting the Royal Mummies' Room of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. (p 241)

Never delay the payment of wages

Abdullah ibn Umar records the Prophet as saying, "Pay a labourer his wages before his sweat has dried."